

# EMERGING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NATO'S SOUTH: HOW CAN THE ALLIANCE RESPOND?

*Given the complexity and diversity of the security environment in NATO's South, the Alliance must adopt a multi-dimensional approach that seeks to project stability through a range of different tools. Among them that the author highlights are the strengthening of NATO's military means of defense; advising and assisting local forces in the region; deepening its cooperation with regional partners and international organizations; and enhancing its strategic awareness on energy, cyber, and other critical developments. Taken together, such steps should help turn NATO into a more proactive organization, better able to anticipate and defuse future crises.*

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**T**oday, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is facing a more complex array of challenges and threats than it has at any time since the end of the Cold War. For the first time in its history, the Alliance is dealing simultaneously with major threats from two strategic directions. Preeminent among these threats are the provocative actions of a more aggressive and assertive Russia, which continues to display little regard for international law, and the challenges posed by an unstable Middle East and North Africa (MENA) right on NATO's doorstep.



The difference between the two regions is not simply a matter of geography. They also present different challenges with respect to NATO's political and military strategy. In NATO's East, where the main challenge is posed by one state actor, familiar concepts of deterrence can be applied with a high degree of confidence, even though hybrid actions further complicate the security landscape. In NATO's South, however, deterrence through military reprisal is unlikely to keep most threats at bay. The combination of weak states, non-state actors, regional tensions, political and religious radicalism – coupled with an enormous influx of refugees – calls for a far more complex approach. Above all, it requires a thorough understanding of the interaction between different factors.

### *A Complex Challenge*

All of the allies support the security of NATO member Turkey, which finds itself under tremendous pressure due to the instability it faces on several fronts. They are also part of the coalition fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Moreover, NATO is seeking to enhance the stability and resilience of countries in the region by offering them support in building defense capacity. This means that allies are now engaged in a region of tremendous complexity. Iran and Saudi Arabia remain locked in geopolitical, economic, and religious rivalry, while Iraq is suffering from the ISIL offensive and domestic tensions. Although there are some reasons for optimism due to the formation of an internationally recognized government, the security situation in Libya remains complex and concerning. Russia's entry into the Syrian civil war has complicated matters even further. As

a result, NATO allies will have to deal with several actors in the region whose geopolitical objectives are not only at odds with one another, but whose political agendas may also be increasingly shaped by the need to cope with economic decline and domestic unrest. The region's oil-producing countries in particular could become even less predictable due to the repercussions of the current low oil prices. In short, if NATO is serious about projecting stability to its southern borders, a "one-size-fits-all" approach will not work. The Alliance needs to adopt a multi-layered strategy that takes into account regional specifics. There are four areas in particular that stand out.

First, NATO needs to bolster its collective defense and deterrence capabilities. It would be a major mistake to discuss this issue only in an Eastern context. Not only do several NATO allies border the Mediterranean Sea, but Russia's maritime ambitions have also underscored the strategic importance of the Eastern Mediterranean (and, by extension, the Black Sea). The maritime dimension is all the more important given the flexibility of naval forces in crises. Their response can range from demonstrations of force through mere presence to specific tasks that apply tailored force. This has been demonstrated through assurance measures in the Baltic and Black Seas, as well as by NATO's swift deployment of Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 to conduct reconnaissance, monitoring, and surveillance of illegal crossings in the Aegean Sea. For the same reason, allies must retain the expeditionary capabilities that enable it to confront ISIL militarily and respond to similar challenges in the future.

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Sending a credible signal of determination and reassurance to those allies that are geographically most exposed, whether they are located in the east or south, conveys an important message, namely that Europe and North America consider themselves to be one single security space. The fact that more and more allies are increasing their defense budgets says more about NATO's credibility in this regard than any communique ever could.

Second, NATO needs to strengthen its ability to project stability in the neighborhood and to advise and assist local forces. For more than two decades NATO has trained local forces across the world. This support has ranged from sending advisory teams into defense ministries to deploying military and police trainers on the ground, even in hazardous situations. NATO is the framework that makes it possible to maximize

the impact of every contribution from allies and partners. As the demand for capacity building grows, however, a more robust approach is required.

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Training needs to be made a core capability. NATO needs to build ready-to-go capabilities that allow us to plan, coordinate, and deploy advisory support and training missions faster, and bring together the necessary tools for capacity building and training. The Alliance has already made a good start, most notably with its “Resolute Support” training mission in Afghanistan. NATO has also launched training and capacity building initiatives

in Georgia and Moldova. In Jordan, training for Iraqi officers started in March 2016. Moreover, NATO will be advising Tunisia on counter-terrorism strategies and helping improve the capacity of their armed forces. NATO also stands ready to assist Libya, as soon as the political conditions are conducive to support. This broad array of training efforts demonstrates NATO’s potential in this regard. At the Warsaw Summit, these activities should be consolidated into a major defense capacity building initiative.

Third, NATO needs to take its cooperation with regional partners and international organizations to a new level. To project stability in the southern region, we need to work with those who know the region best. Hence, closer relations between NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council could be one important piece of the puzzle. The latter is developing its ability to command large multi-national operations, and NATO has unique expertise in building and maintaining an integrated military structure. We can share that expertise but also need to explore how to strengthen our cooperation on counter-terrorism, energy and maritime security, and cyber defense. What is more, the new NATO regional cooperation center in Kuwait provides us with another way to reinforce our partnerships, notably by fostering cooperation between NATO and its Gulf partners in areas such as military-to-military cooperation, strategic analysis, and civil emergency planning. The “King Abdullah Special Operations Training Centre” in Jordan, where the training of Iraqi officers is now taking place, is certified according to NATO standards, and represents another platform for joint efforts. We must do more to complement bilateral efforts and to strengthen the capacity of regional organizations. This is the best way to leverage their expertise, resources, and cultural awareness in support of our training initiatives. Ultimately, our aim must be to enable our partners in the MENA region to play an even greater role in achieving regional security.

Lastly, NATO needs to enhance its strategic awareness of energy security developments. In NATO's South, and not only in the Eastern Mediterranean, energy remains the proverbial "elephant in the room." Throughout the MENA region, energy producers are suffering from low oil prices. As this price is not likely to reach 100 dollars per barrel or more like it did in the past decade, their economies

will suffer financial losses. This threatens the "social contract" between some regimes and their populations. In states that used to offer generous public subsidies, a continuing global oil glut could translate into public unrest. Some analysts argue that the low price of oil will also contribute to international stability because it will force petro-states to focus on their domestic woes, thus allowing them fewer opportunities to pursue assertive foreign policy agendas. While this may be true for some countries, it is clearly not the case for others. Rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, for example, show no signs of ending their geopolitical competition due to domestic economic considerations. If anything, this competition is taking on an increasingly military dimension, as demonstrated by their involvement in the war in Yemen. At the same time, the discovery of major natural gas fields in the Levant Basin of the Eastern Mediterranean has the potential both to transform the energy outlook of the countries in which they were found, and to foster regional energy cooperation. Clearly, much of this potential will depend on the evolution of energy prices, but if the states in the region take cooperative approaches, they could use energy as a catalyst for positive change.

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These two scenarios demonstrate the importance of energy as a driver of NATO's strategic environment. Even though NATO is not an energy institution, the allies need to intensify intelligence-sharing on energy developments, and also have the North Atlantic Council discuss the implications of, for example, how the low oil price environment will affect security. In a similar vein, the Alliance has started to incorporate energy elements into its exercises. Moreover, in recent years, NATO has also broadened the cooperative menu for interested partner countries. It now includes the possibility of energy-related Table-Top Exercises, such as the 2014 event organized by the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence in Vilnius with experts from Gulf partner countries. The most recent addition to NATO's energy security toolbox is enhanced training on energy security, both at the Centre of Excellence and the NATO School in Oberammergau, as well as through online courses. All these steps should ensure that NATO stays abreast of global and regional energy developments and that Alliance partners share valuable expertise.

***Conclusion: A More Proactive Alliance***

All these strands of work point towards the same conclusion. NATO needs to become more proactive. Over the past few years, we have put increasing emphasis on examining non-traditional challenges. We have considered terrorism, cyber warfare, proliferation, and energy security. We have also looked at the security implications of climate change and maritime security. We have examined how all of these challenges interact. We have started to integrate non-traditional challenges into the storyline of our crisis management exercises, and we have stepped up training and education in these areas.

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But more needs to be done. For example, we need to put even greater emphasis on intelligence-sharing. We also need to focus more strongly on strategic analysis and on harnessing the expertise of the private sector, for example on energy security and cyber defense. Last, but certainly not least, the North Atlantic Council also needs to devote more time

to discussing disturbing security developments. In hindsight, it is not enough to claim that we should have seen the crisis coming. We must become better at anticipating crises, and use NATO’s political and military toolbox to defuse them.

The great French historian Fernand Braudel once called the Mediterranean “a thousand things in one.” He was referring to the unique character of this region as a crossroads of cultures, religions, and ideas. Exerting a positive influence on this complex region will remain one of NATO’s greatest challenges. However, if the allies maintain the sense of purpose that has been the hallmark of NATO for 67 years, even this major challenge can ultimately be overcome.